FOREIGN IMMIGRANTS IN EARLY BOURBON MEXICO 1700–1760

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Contents

Tables and figures

Introduction

A handful of scholars have written about foreigners in other periods or in other parts of the Spanish American empire. A few authorities in dealing with their own topics have also touched on foreigners. Synthesizing these various views and applying them to colonial Mexico in the first half of the eighteenth century would suggest several things. The most important of these inferences are that Spanish law was reasonably effective in excluding foreigners, that there were a few exceptions such as prisoners of war, illicit traders, and Jesuits, but that even then their numbers were small. Since the kings of Spain and their advisers saw aliens as potential threats to imperial, religious, and mercantile security and since the crown legislated accordingly, it might also be assumed that the Spaniards were both xenophobic and intolerant. Reinforcing this view still further, surviving sixteenth-century Protestant and eighteenth-century Enlightenment prejudices about the Inquisition might exaggerate both the zeal of the Holy Office and the bigotry of Spaniards toward outsiders.

The laws were strict, but the documents, primarily from the Archive of the Indies (AGI) in Seville and the National Archive of Mexico (AGN) in Mexico City, suggest that the preceding assumptions misconstrue the situation in New Spain between 1700 and 1760. Prisoners of war often stayed to settle after their release, most foreign merchants had nothing to do with smuggling, and Jesuits were not the only foreign churchmen. In addition to all of these, however, still other foreigners entered the viceroyalty as soldiers, sailors, drifters, and fugitives. Most settled and adapted to life as they found it. Protestants accepted Catholicism, single men married, and successful ones sought naturalization. Through it all, Spanish officialdom, including the Holy Office of the Inquisition, followed policies that offered toleration to those who conformed. Most adapted, and the result was that, although the authorities had often ignored or bypassed statutes in order to let

the newcomers stay, the underlying aims of those same laws became reality as foreign immigrants faded into the society of the viceroyalty. Foreigners did represent a small number of the total population of New Spain, but they comprised some 3 percent of the European born.

Though unobtrusive, these foreigners had experiences that provide a significant collective example of how Spanish colonial justice worked. Legal practice stressed precedent rather than code; tolerance was more general than exceptional; and administration was more humane than inefficient. Corruption there was, but the overall picture fails to confirm the Black Legend of a Spanish empire awash in bigotry, sloth, and injustice. Yet fencing with a retreating straw man has its limits; tracing the interplay of law and practice that faced foreigners in early Bourbon Mexico has descriptive value in its own right.

Who, after all, were these outsiders? The generally accepted definition of 'foreigner' implies either those born outside the area under discussion (which would make European Spaniards, Filipinos, and Spanish South Americans 'foreigners') or those born outside the empire (which would make Flemings and a number of Italians 'citizens'). Neither of these interpretations will quite suffice to translate *extranjero* as used with reference to Spanish America in the eighteenth century. The only workable definition is that used by the Spaniards at the time; namely, that a foreigner was anyone (excluding slaves) born outside Spain or the Indies.[1] Yet in practice, non-Spanish subjects of the crown, including, among others, Flemings, Sardinians, Neapolitans, and Milanese, found readier acceptance than did foreigners from other nations.

Most foreigners were Europeans, a minority were colonial subjects of other powers, and a few came from such places as Persia, Armenia, and India. Still, no one on the following pages has been identified as an alien simply because of a name. To have done so would have risked the inclusion of Spanish- or Indies-born descendants of foreigners and, perhaps, a few Basques and Catalans as well. Names cut the other way too. The scribes wrote what they heard or spelled as their mood dictated. They did a particularly bad job with French surnames. In addition, foreigners Hispanized their names by translating meaning, by adopting similar sounding Spanish names, or occasionally by pulling an alias out of the air. The documents, for example, describe 'Isidro Bebeagua' (Isidor Drinkwater) as being from 'Verdini' (Virginia) in the Kingdom of

England and a native of the city of 'Guillermo Vergui' (Williamsburg).[2] In order to spare the reader such anomalies, an attempt is made on the following pages to put the names of foreigners back into the 'original'.[3]

Although other regions of Spanish America, particularly those bordering on the Caribbean, also had foreign visitors and immigrants, this study is concerned with those aliens who had contact with the Viceroyalty of New Spain. Large and complex, with well-developed institutions, diverse peoples, a mature colonial economy, and several large cities, eighteenth-century New Spain was of great significance to the empire. The nature of the country was such that many who came as transients stayed on to settle.

The viceroy with his capital at Mexico City was the crown's chief executive officer for a vast domain, including not only colonial Mexico, but also the Philippines, Central America, Spanish islands in the Caribbean, the northern frontier from California to Florida, and at times Venezuela as well.[4] Yet because his 'subordinates' in these peripheral areas often corresponded directly with the Royal and Supreme Council of the Indies at the apex of Spain's non-European empire, the viceroy's main responsibility was for the two jurisdictions that almost equally divided the 700,000 or so square miles of colonial Mexico. These two areas, the Audiencias of Mexico and Guadalajara, taken together comprised the region most often referred to as New Spain. Of the approximate total of 3,500,000 persons who lived in New Spain between 1700 and 1760, the Audiencia of Mexico had almost six out of seven.[5] In fact, the Kingdom of New Spain, that part of the Audiencia which had given its name to the whole viceroyalty, had the bulk of the people. This spacious and well-populated kingdom covered the extent of the empire of Montezuma but also included Tlaxcala, Michoacán, and certain other regions which were never tributary to the Aztecs. The Audiencia of Mexico also included tiny Tabasco, virtually independent Yucatán, frontier Texas, and the largely pastoral provinces of Coahuila and Nuevo León. All but the central-Mexican Kingdom of New Spain had small populations. To the north and west lay the Audiencia of Guadalajara, a jurisdiction as large as its sister but unable to compete in population, wealth, or prestige. Here the Audiencia also included New Vizcaya, California, Sinaloa, New Mexico, and, for judicial matters, Nayarit, Nombre de Dios, and a tiny part of the Kingdom of New Spain.

The peoples who inhabited the viceroyalty were a varied lot.[6] Their numbers increased from fewer than 3,000,000 in 1700 to almost 3,750,000 in 1760. The increase would doubtless have been more rapid but for the periodic levelings caused by famine, disease, and occasional natural disaster. Hard hit by these calamities, the Indians continued their decline as a percentage of the population, a trend which had started with the coming of the Spaniards. Though they had begun a slow absolute recovery by the mid-seventeenth century, Indians continued to lose relative ground to the new mixed groups or *castas*.[7] Of these, the mestizos were the most numerous. Interracial unions also served to dilute the blood of pure blacks. Negroes and their identifiable descendants, the *pardos*, remained numerically important in some of the humid coastal and lowland regions of New Spain, but they were almost insignificant in the central highlands where Indians and mestizos predominated. In the 1740s the population of southern Mexico was still roughly 90 percent indigenous, but for the viceroyalty as a whole, Indians accounted for about 60 percent of the total. The other 40 percent was divided rather unevenly among *castas*, whites, and blacks. A few Filipinos concentrated in Acapulco and Mexico City.[8] Whites, rapidly increasing in the eighteenth century, also preferred cities. In 1742 there were about 450,000 of these persons in New Spain. Most were native born, but some 29,000 were Europeans. Probably no more than 15 percent of these newcomers were women who had accompanied their husbands, fathers, or employers to the New World. About 3 percent of the immigrants were foreigners. Since Indians and *castas* provided the peasant agricultural base of society, aliens, like whites generally, tried to find slots in the small middle and upper groups. Some succeeded; others failed.

Stratified by class, color, and even culture, New Spain was in some ways a rich country. Silver mines, mostly in the north and west, provided the most valuable export, but chocolate, sugar, vanilla, cochineal, and other exotic products also earned income for the viceroyalty. Ranches in the north helped feed the miners and sent hides, wool, and other products to markets both within and outside the country. The textile workshops (*obrajes*) of New Spain sent cotton and woolen fabrics as far away as Peru. The sleepy Pacific port of Acapulco tied colonial Mexico to Manila and thus to Asian sources of luxury goods for re-export to Europe and South America. Though twice as large as Acapulco, Vera-

cruz, the main port of the viceroyalty, had only 8,000 persons in 1740. Yet the interior supported a number of true urban centers, the grandest of which was Mexico City.

Originally built by the Aztecs on an island in the west of the once huge Lake Texcoco, the city still faced water on the east and south.[9] The government had undertaken several projects to control the waters of the lakes, but the immensity of the task and the huge and rising costs militated against an easy solution.[10] The city itself spread out in the form of a square on soft mucky ground and circumscribed an area of about eighteen square miles.[11] The central district, called La Traza, contained the government offices and finest buildings. Most of the white residents lived in this three-square-mile zone that centered on the Plaza Mayor, the great square. Well-built structures and beautiful churches dotted the city with opulence. There were eighty-four chapels and almost fifty rich *conventos*. These convents were not mere monasteries, for the Spanish kings had forbidden contemplative orders of monks to go to the New World. Only working orders like the Jesuits, Augustinians, Franciscans, Dominicans, and others, supplemented by nuns, might function in the Indies. Some of the orders provided direct services to the populace by operating hospitals, schools, and public baths. The convents shared the city with a major university, with government offices, with the quarters of the Inquisition and the guilds, with fine homes, and with meaner structures filled with every variety of humanity. The great unfinished cathedral stood next to the viceregal palace on the Plaza Mayor.[12] Other plazas and public promenades set with fountains added freshness to the city. The north–south and east–west streets were broad by the standards of the day, some as wide as 'ten lances'.[13] At night lanterns lit the streets until 10.00 p.m. The law required each place of business to light such a device, and the city government maintained its own in areas where there were few shops. Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri, a Neapolitan who visited Mexico City in 1697, found it to be physically impressive, saying that it competed with the 'finest' in his native Italy.[14]

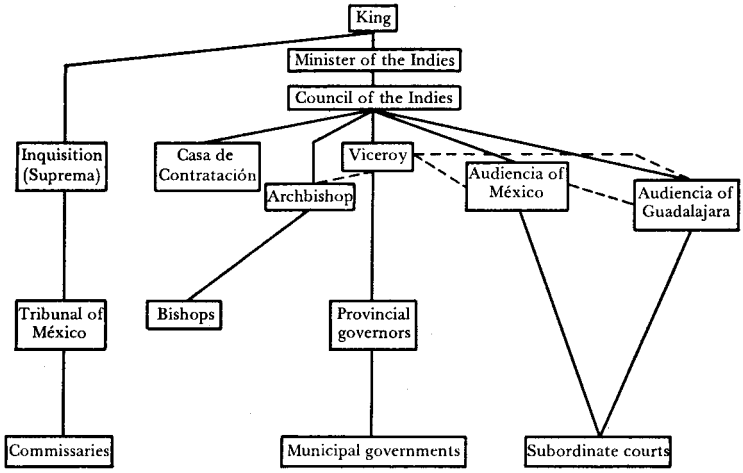
Striking to see, Mexico City was by far the largest city in North America.[15] In 1700, nearly 100,000 persons lived there. In the immediate vicinity, there were perhaps that many again, and Gemelli Careri noted that everywhere the number was increasing.[16] Slightly over 50 percent were Spaniards, 8 to 9 percent Indians, and the rest mestizos, blacks, and mulattoes.[17] By the end

of the century, whites outnumbered Indians in the valley by two to one. Incomplete data, surviving from the censuses of 1689 and 1753, indicate that the bulk of the whites were native born. Of those who were not, the vast majority were peninsular Spaniards, but, significantly, almost 4 percent of the Europeans were foreigners in 1689. The figure was just under 3 percent in 1753. Since they were not supposed to be there at all, it seems reasonable to assume that the percentage of aliens in each case was actually higher and that some of the foreigners found ways to avoid the census takers just as did 20 to 30 percent of the rest of the population of Mexico City.

The climate of the Valley of Mexico was much like that of Spain itself.[18] An altitude of some 7,400 feet that produced cool nights, warm days, clear air, and blue skies mitigated some otherwise unhealthy conditions. Packs of stray, ownerless dogs abounded in the city, so many that when the government ordered the *guardia* to deplete the numbers of these pests in 1748, the constables killed almost 6,000.[19] The canals that entered the city from several directions, and over which Indians ferried agricultural products, also served as disposal points for the wastes of the populace and resident animals. During the rainy season, these canals sometimes flooded and deposited their disease-laden contents throughout the city, while in the dry season, they added their dust to that which blew in from a rocky volcanic wasteland, the Pedrigal, located a few miles to the south.[20] In spite of these drawbacks, one of the canals doubled as a recreation spot. This was the canal of Jamaica that cut south from the city and east of the Pedrigal to the village of Ixtacalco. Dressing themselves after the most current fashion, some of the more prosperous members of the community boarded small flower-covered barges and spent leisurely Sunday afternoons floating down the canal and listening to the musicians who accompanied them.

On a normal day, the government began work at eight o'clock in the summer and nine o'clock in the winter, but with the rising of the sun the streets had already begun to bustle with priests and religious, with vendors of bread, milk, chocolate, meat, and other necessities, with servants, merchants, and soldiers going about their tasks or heading for some destination, and with beggars and minstrels wandering about with little or no purpose except, perhaps, survival.[21] All colors, classes, and professions went to the markets. There were several of these in the city, offering thou-

sands of items from blankets and shoes to flowers and songbirds, but the central market took place in the Plaza Mayor. Gemelli Careri noted that the city's almost 4,000 vagabonds spent their days here, sleeping where they could at night. The market place shone with contrasting colors and reeked of foul smells. Excrement and garbage littered the ground, for men and women alike relieved themselves when and where the need arose. No matter what they were selling, the Indians decorated their little stalls with flowers and spread their wares on large leaves. In addition to the markets, the city had a number of specialty shops, each type tending to cluster together and giving their product names to many of the streets. With all its markets and merchandise, the city made it possible, said Gemelli, for a man 'to live like a gentleman for no more than half a peso a day'.[22]



The flow of power for early Bourbon Mexico
(Solid lines denote a downward flow of power and an upward movement of appeals. Dotted lines symbolize shared authority, with relative height indicating greater or lesser power and importance.)

Although a center for commerce and population, Mexico City was first and foremost the capital of a great colony. The viceroy headed the government and served many functions. He was chief executive, vice-patron of the Church, first tax collector, chief justice, and as captain general, commander of all of the military forces in the country. He shared his civil powers with the audiencia, his patronage with the archbishop, his investigative and tax

collecting responsibilities with numerous agencies and courts, but his military command was his own.[23] The Audiencia of Mexico, a supreme court and viceregal council of one criminal and two civil chambers, advised the viceroy on policy matters and decided important cases. Besides his own archdiocese, the archbishop had nine suffragan bishoprics. Four of these, Guatemala, Honduras, Chiapas, and Nicaragua, were beyond the effective jurisdiction of the viceroy. The others, Puebla, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Guadalajara, Yucatán, and New Vizcaya, lay within the confines of the viceroyalty. The Protomedicato, made up of three prominent doctors, regulated the practice of medicine in the colony. The largely independent Holy Office of the Inquisition met in the 'sumptuous' Imperial Convento de Santo Domingo and stood ready to protect the faith. Two judges and the fiscal or crown attorney, all called inquisitors, made up the tribunal of this important social court. Other government tribunals dealt with matters of the treasury and the royal monopolies of mercury, playing cards, alcoholic drinks, sealed paper, tanning agents, gunpowder, copper, alum, cock fights, and mountain snow used in the preparation of a kind of ice cream.

Subject to the viceroy and the audiencia, the city had its own government.[24] Called the Ayuntamiento and headed by a council, in the same way as analogous municipal governments throughout the Spanish world, it looked after the general welfare of the city and occasionally provided bullfights for the citizens. Under the Ayuntamiento were the *alcaldes ordinarios* or magistrates. These men each had their own jurisdictions where they judged and sentenced in minor civil and criminal cases. More important cases might go directly to the audiencia. The guilds policed their own members and sometimes provided a kind of social security for them. They often sponsored charitable acts, fiestas, and bullfights. They also maintained a militia, in case the city should need one. The most important guild in Mexico City was the *consulado*, made up of the more powerful merchants. Their tribunal met in the viceregal palace and aided the government in collecting customs duties and protecting the monopolistic trading system. Until late in the century, this was the only *consulado* in New Spain.

Not even Guadalajara had such a body. As the second capital of the viceroyalty, however, it did have its own audiencia, of which none of the other major cities in the country could boast.[25] This court was smaller than the one in Mexico City, and even

though it had its own president, or presiding officer, it was still subject to the viceroy. Located some 200 miles west and a little to the north of Mexico City, Guadalajara had a temperate climate, sturdy buildings and regular streets. In 1742 Guadalajara had a population of some 76,000 persons. Of the other bishoprics, Valladolid (Morelia), about 160 miles southeast of Guadalajara, had a population of fewer than 25,000 persons. Mérida, with some 7,000 inhabitants, was stuck away in the interior of Yucatán. Antequera de Oaxaca, 240 miles southeast of Mexico City with 34,000 Spaniards and mestizos, was one of the more important cities of the viceroyalty. Durango, 480 miles northwest from the capital, had a population of 20,000, but the city remained little more than a focus for the scattered mines, ranches, and missions of the northern frontier. Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas had no bishops, but they were still important cities in eighteenth-century New Spain. The great city of Puebla lay between Mexico City and Veracruz. On his way back to Europe, Gemelli Careri passed through Puebla and described it as a city almost as large as the capital, but cleaner and quieter.

Unlike most other travelers, Gemelli Careri had arrived in New Spain via Acapulco. It was January 1697 when he stepped off the boat in Mexico.[26] Leaving home some five years earlier and financing his travels through buying and selling as he went, Gemelli had crossed the Mediterranean, and traveled through North Africa, Asia Minor, India, and the Philippines where he took passage for Acapulco. There obtaining a 'passport' from the cooperative governor, Gemelli made friends rapidly. He was a non-Spanish subject of the crown and thus found readier acceptance than would a foreigner from another nation. But he was also an educated man and a world traveler whose entertaining company must have been appreciated by those whom he encountered in New Spain. In Mexico City he even met Viceroy Sarmiento, the Count of Moctezuma. On arriving in Veracruz, his point of departure, Gemelli Careri went the next morning to pay his respects to the local governor.[27] The traveler had to wait some time to find a ship to take him to Europe, and he amused himself by hunting in coastal river valleys. Always the diplomat, Gemelli several times treated the governor to venison and fowl. When the ships finally arrived, this friendship proved valuable, for the governor helped Gemelli to obtain passage and, at the same time, to avoid the royal customs.

Finally, after a voyage that took him to Spain with a stop first in Havana, Gemelli Careri arrived home in Naples. He wasted no time in publishing an account of his travels. The Italian devoted a lengthy part of his *Giro intorno al Mondo* to New Spain.[28] The book first appeared in 1700 and went through several printings. Gemelli had added another volume to the already considerable body of literature about New Spain. Tales about the wealth and wonder of this land had been floating around Europe since French corsairs had captured the first treasure ship that Cortés sent to Charles V in 1519. Accounts told by sailors, priests, merchants, and travelers (including Gemelli Careri) may have inspired some Europeans to go and see for themselves.

These aliens and those who arrived by chance faced several obstacles to entry and, if they decided to stay, to settlement. But before tracing foreigners over the hurdles to acceptance, it will be necessary to examine the official attitudes of the government and the threats that foreigners, as a group, represented to the interests of the crown. The interpretation of the resulting laws, in turn, was the opening through which foreigners entered New Spain and settled.